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Greek and Roman Theatres in Mediterranean area International Seminar

Tuesday 11th June | Wednesday 12th June 2019
Palazzo Badoer, Aula Tafuri

Giada Cavaggion, Filippo Cecchinato, Leonardo Cosaro, and Francesco Pasinato Verona Arena or Amphitheatre

The Arena of Verona is a roman amphitheatre located in piazza Bra in Verona, Italy. It is considered one of the biggest building of roman architecture and also one of the best conserved thanks to the restorations made during the VI century.

It is possible to compare the Arena with the Amphitheatre of Pola as they are similar from the stylistic aspect and for the technical ones, too. Today the aspect of the monument is more different from the original one.

The Ala is the only piece remained from the original façade, composed by four arches. The ala is necessary a monumental façade: its arches show empty spaces under the cavea, while the huge pillars summarize the internal line of structure. The three overlapped arches gave the idea of the existence of two galleries and a superior colonnade, while architraves completed the arches of the internal galleries. In this way the internal structure finds an esthetical and spatial expression.

At the moment there aren't any statues in the amphitheatre. All the finds are kept at the Archaeological Museum and Lapidario Maffeiano Museum in Verona.

There are different opinions regarding the date of construction. Since the Arena is similar to the Amphitheatre of Pola, in fact it is supposed that they were designed from the same architect. The construction of Amphitheatre of Pola is dated during the Augusteo period, so it is probably that arena was made in the same period.

Another evidence is given from the head gladiator's statue. This type of helmet was common at the end of the Augustan age, between 10 and 20 D.C., so the building could have been built between the end of August's reign and the beginning of Claudio one.

The amphitheatre's history is unknown in the ancientness, even if there are some evidence that refer to the roman period in Verona. The city was involved in the war between Vitellio and Vespasiano. Vespasiano chose the city as military fortress because it was surrounded by open fields where cavalry could be used.

Anyway this method was useless because the amphitheatre was located outside the walls. So he decided to build protections against enemies using a long moat in the south of the city.

Gallieno emperor was occupied in long wars against barbarian invasions during the III century and he decided to use Verona as a new defence strategy by expanding the city's walls where also Arena was included.

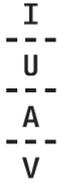
In 1874 Antonio Pompei made archaeological excavation around Arena and he discovered foundations of Gallieno's walls. It is possible that, even if there are no certain evidence, the amphitheatre was used for Christian's torture. In 312 Verona was involved in another war between Costantino and Massenzio. Arena became the city bastion's defence since it was higher than Gallieno's walls.

The gladiators' plays ended as the Christianity began, and the inefficiency of public functions was another reason for not preserve the monument of Arena. It is probably that the fall of the external ring was caused by several earthquakes located in the North of Italy, including the most catastrophic one happened in 1117.

The Arena was used, like a colosseum, to offer at the citizens various types of show, including the clash of gladiators. Restored by Teodorico, king of Goths, his cavea was used as a quarry for marble stone for construction of buildings, still visible today.

Since 1600, the avenue for riders and shows such as the hunting of bulls, the Verona Arena since 18th century hosted a series of operas, first of all La Santa Alleanza, with music by Gioacchino Rossini. However, the first opera season was in 1913. From that year the Veronese Amphitheatre became the largest open air opera theatre in the world.

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By being so popular, there are several drawings about that depict the Arena from different ages, one of the most famous is the first printed one made by Sebastiano Serlio in 1540, where the representation is similar to reality. Talking about the interventions that has been made to save the Arena during the centuries, the first documented amphitheatre restoration activities were made in the XIII century. In the XVI and XVII century there were made some interventions but the main activities were made in the XVIII century. In 1710 the central well and the elliptical canal facing the first step were discovered, then some important works of clearing the layer of earth (120 cm) that covered the arena floor and were made between 1728- 1729, while from 1731-1735 they restored and consolidate the Wing. Between 1761-1772 and 1780-83 we have the excavation, survey of the ellipse, the Euripio and the podium. In the XIX century excavations were made outside the amphitheatre to ascertain the continuation of the canal aligned with the major axis and found the foundations of the walls of Gallienus, who were going to cut the canal 1820: Municipality decided to evict houses from the Arena with the demolition of the latter too close to the amphitheatre. In the XX century there were made some works of consolidation with the insertion of steel cables in the 5 vertical pillars that support the Wing, the recovery of the archways still occupied by warehouses and shops, and some restoration works of the internal stairs, demolishing of the old roof of the pit with a new one. Lastly from 1970 till nowadays routine maintenance operations have been made, until November 2018 when finally there were made some serious interventions about the systems, mainly the electric one, and as part of a future project, the opening of underground passages to visitors and construction of a museum tour with multimedia panels.